

# River Road

*It was the Columbia--not this 1912 version of Evergreen Highway--that put the first Fisher's Landing on the map*



Fisher's Landing has its roots in the middle of the last century, when two families of many brothers and sisters, the Simmons clan and the Fishers, trekked west by wagon train, turned away from the California gold fields, and claimed land for themselves at what is now 164th Avenue and the Evergreen Highway.

They arrived in 1851 when the north shore was safely in American hands instead of those of the British. The fear that the British would control the north side of the Columbia is what kept the future state of Washington from being settled as early by those on the "Oregon" trail.

Descendants of those pioneers who first crossed the river have been interviewed by the Clark County Historical Society and their recollections paint a fascinating picture of life at the foot of 164th--then Fisher's Road. The name was bequeathed by the original Simmons, to honor his wife, who happened to be a Fisher. Brother Solomon Fisher gets most of the credit for the establishment of the community in history books, being the first postmaster at the crossroads.

eral store, schoolhouse, early grange and dock facility used to stretch to the river. Picture piles of cord wood lining both sides of that old Fisher's Road from the dock to what is now McGillivray, just waiting to be loaded onto steamships that stopped for fuel before powering up for Camas and Washougal.

Several steamers stopped every day at the landing, and it took a full day just to make the trip from Vancouver and back. Of course, one historian points out, the steamers were forever criss-crossing the river to pick up passengers at private landings where white flags would hail the riverboat captain.

Those grandchildren of the pioneers could remember watching elk and deer in the vicinity, seals that played off the shore at Camas, and years when the

river would completely swim dry and people would drive teams of horses to Government Island. They recalled when electricity came to their farmhouses (1921) and the road, which started out as age-old Indian trail, was paved (1926).

The railroad pushed through at the turn of the century, and its tracks obliterated the first Fisher homestead. Within 10 years, the docks had fallen into disrepair as train travel took the place of river travel. Still, memories handed down of walking to Camas in the 1920's and catching a lift back on a train for a nickel--engineers all stopped for all passengers.

Highway 14 runs over the site of the Fisher one-room schoolhouse. In fact, it was probably such paving that led to the demise of yesterday's little communities, including the gas station general store combinations once found at Leiser and Ellsworth. Before Oregon installed its freeway along the river, trucks drove the old Evergreen Highway on the Washington side to avoid the south shore's twisting scenic route that led up to Vista House and down Multnomah Falls. A ferry at Hood River took them back to Oregon, although a bridge was contemplated prior to World War I that would have linked Portland to--you guessed it--Fisher's Landing. It would take 60-plus years for the I-205 bridge even to come close.

## Did You Know Fisher's Landing Was Almost the County Seat?

Those same descendants mentioned above could tell you Fisher's Landing was once considered--briefly--as the county seat when factions in Vancouver (then Columbia City) argued over land for building sites. It was, after all, a river town, a town linked communities as the muddy, unnavigable roads would not for many years. The Landing would boast one of four area post offices in the area by 1855. Submerged pilings from the original two-tier dock (built for high and low water) are still visible.